



HOW TO CHOOSE A VESTIBULAR SPECIALIST

Vestibular disorders are often difficult to diagnose and treat. You can greatly reduce the time it takes to get an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment by finding a qualified vestibular specialist.

How to choose a vestibular specialist (general):

1. **Specialty:** Has the professional identified themselves as a vestibular specialist? *(Note: VEDA membership implies self-selection as a vestibular specialist.)*
2. ***Training:** Do they have additional training and/or education in a vestibular specialty? *(Note: this may be in the form of a post-doctoral program, residency, fellowship, or extended training course. One-day training courses do not qualify a professional as a vestibular specialist.)*
3. **Experience:** How long has the professional been working primarily with vestibular patients? *(Note: Many professionals fresh out of school are very passionate about the vestibular specialty, so this criterion should be used loosely.)*
4. ***Equipment:** Do they possess the specialized equipment needed to assess and treat balance disorders?
5. **Practice:** Does their practice focus on vestibular patients? Are they a part of a team of vestibular specialists, or are they associated with other specialists they can consult with?
6. ***Professional Associations:** Are they a member of a professional association's vestibular sub-specialty group?
7. ***Initial Visit:** How long is their initial patient examination? Do they take the time to take a complete patient case history?
8. **Personal Style:** Do you feel like this person genuinely cares about your well-being? Are they empathetic to the impact your vestibular symptoms have had on your daily life? Are they committed to helping you find a diagnosis, whether it is through their own practice or by referring you to another specialist?

**More details may be available for individual specialties below.*

PHYSICAL THERAPIST (PT)

1. **Training:** They have substantial post-graduate training in vestibular rehabilitation (i.e. beyond a 2-day weekend introductory course). The gold standard for vestibular PT training is through Emory University's "Vestibular Rehabilitation: A Competency Based Course" by Drs. Susan Herdman and Richard Clendaniel.
2. **Equipment:** They have a way to evaluate eye movements with visual fixation prevented (e.g. infrared goggles or Frenzel lenses).
3. **Professional Associations:** They are a member of an accredited PT association identified as having a special interest in vestibular disorders (e.g. American Physical Therapy Association's Vestibular Special Interest Group, a.k.a. APTA Vestibular SIG).
4. **Initial Visit:** The length of your initial visit is ~1 hour.
5. **Other:**
 - a. They provide you with one-on-one treatment (i.e. they are not treating several patients in the same or different rooms concurrently).
 - b. They are involved in a multi-disciplinary team (i.e. other specialties, e.g. an audiologist and otolaryngologist) that provides help with consultation and referral.



AUDIOLOGIST

How to choose an audiologist:

1. **Training:** The audiologist has a masters degree with substantial training in vestibular assessment or a doctoral level degree (PhD or AuD). Look for an audiologist with a practice focused on vestibular patients.
2. **Equipment:** In addition to basic audiometric equipment (audiometer, tympanometer, otoacoustic emissions), vestibular focused audiologists have equipment that can evaluate and assess eye movements and balance. Those can include Frenzel Lenses/Video Frenzels, electronystagmography (ENG)/videonystagmography (VNG), evoked potentials (ABR, VEMP and others), head impulse testing (vHIT), balance platform, and rotary chair.
3. **Professional Associations:** There are a number of professional organizations for audiologists, including the American Academy of Audiologists (AAA), American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), American Auditory Society (AAS), and the American Balance Society (ABS). All are reputable and support the audiologist in development and training opportunities.
4. **Initial Visit:** The length of the visit can vary depending on the nature of the symptoms. A BPPV patient may only require a 30 minute evaluation, but a more complex vestibular patient could take 4+ hours to complete all the necessary testing.

How to evaluate your audiologist:

1. Case history - does the person seeing the patient spend time to understand their symptoms, when they occurred, did anything provoke them, how long do they last, how do they make you feel, etc.?
2. Are they observant? Do they pay attention to how you walk, talk, how your eyes move?
3. Do they instruct you during the assessment (what you should do when looking at the stimuli, or how you may feel when you are put into a particular position)?
4. Did they take the time to explain your test results to you?
5. Did you feel like you walked out of the office understanding what the next step would be, or what you should do? Do you understand why the next step was recommended?

MEDICAL DOCTOR

(Otolaryngologist (ENT), neurologist, etc.)

Medical doctors who are effective in diagnosing vestibular patients:

1. **Training:** Board certified in otolaryngology or neurology. Fellowship training in neurotology or otoneurology preferred for complex cases.
2. **Equipment:** Minimum - ability to run an OAE (otoacoustic emissions) test, an ENG or VNG test, and a VEMP test. Preferred - CDP (computerized dynamic posturography), VAT (vestibular autorotation test) or rotary chair, vHIT, ability to perform a Tullio's test, ability to perform a fistula test.
3. **Professional Associations:** Belong to professional organizations such as the American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), American Neurotology Society (ANS), or others, attend their conferences for continuing education opportunities, and network with other members.
4. **Initial visit:** This may vary, depending on the complexity of the vestibular patient's symptoms. Patients with a common and easily diagnosed condition, such as BPPV (benign paroxysmal positional vertigo) may be diagnosed quickly (~15 minute exam), whereas complex patients with less common and/or multiple conditions will take longer (>45 minutes). The key here is to know that the doctor will spend time with you as needed to assess your symptoms, and will not simply settle on the easiest diagnosis. For complex cases, additional appointments may be scheduled to further assess the patient.

VESTIBULAR DISORDERS ASSOCIATION



MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

The match between therapist and patient is vital to the experience and outcome of treatment. Shop around - talk to several therapists over the phone, and schedule a free consultation to meet them in person. There is no "right" therapist. First, determine if the therapist has experience with your condition, then assess whether you will feel comfortable working with them.

Questions that can help you choose a mental health therapist:

1. Do they have experience treating people with chronic health conditions in general? With vestibular disorders specifically?
2. Vestibular patients often suffer from anxiety and depression. Ask a therapist if s/he specializes in these conditions (insert your own psychological symptoms here).
3. Do you prefer a male or female therapist?
4. Does age matter? Do you want someone older/younger/the same age as you?
5. Is he/she warm and inviting? How easy would it be to open up and disclose information about yourself to him/her?
6. What is his/her therapeutic approach? Are you comfortable with their style of therapy?
7. Does s/he have a sense of humor? Is this important to you?
8. Is s/he passionate about helping people?
9. Is s/he optimistic yet realistic about helping you set goals?
10. If you are not feeling well and can't make a regularly scheduled session, is s/he willing to do a phone or video consultation?

You may need more than one meeting to determine whether a potential therapist is right for you. Consider meeting with him/her for 3 sessions, and bring up any questions or concerns you have about your therapeutic relationship. How s/he responds to the issues you raise can provide valuable information about the therapist, his/her style, and whether or not you think you will be able to work well with him/her.